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ABSTRACT

In order to determine whether lessons addressed to the expressed personal interest of functionally illiterate adult students would improve their reading skills, 40 such students attending an urban adult education center were divided into two reading classes. All were tested on a silent reading subtest of the Adult Basic Learning Examination and all scored lower than 4.0 grade level. The experimental group of 20 adults was given interest-oriented instructional material, and class time included instruction geared to helping each person develop the skills needed to master her or his specific lesson. The control group received traditional instruction. At the end of the fifteen-week period, another subtest of the Adult Basic Learning Examination was administered to both groups. A comparison of pretest and posttest scores indicated that students who used interest-oriented materials recalled information and interpreted word meanings from context better than the students who used the traditional instructional materials. Thus, it may be concluded that there is a need for providing interest-oriented instructional materials to motivate functionally illiterate adults to react positively to instruction. (JF)

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The Relationship Between Expressed Interests and Reading Achievement in Functionally Illiterate Adults

INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades, numerous studies have been conducted relating to reading instruction for functionally illiterate adults----adults who usually manifest severely limited basic reading skills. Those studies concerning instructional procedures for use with such adults emphasize low readability levels, practical relevance to daily activities, and high personal interest as important factors in instructional reading materials.

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In an effort to show why significant learning interaction occurs when functionally illiterate adults are taught in terms of their expressed interests, Bonanni (1973) conducted a longitudinal study of the nomads of Somalia. His major finding indicated that when adults were taught using personally interesting materials, methods, curricula, and techniques, they achieved significantly higher results on post-assessments than did those who were taught using a traditional instructional system. Other educators (Mills, 1969; Steuart, 1969; Jan-Tausch, 1970; and Bormuth, 1973-1974) have also found hypothetical proof that adds theoretical credibility to Bonanni's finding.

But, although the personal interest factor has been studied under psychological, physiological, and sociological conditions, research has not provided data sufficient to prove that personally interesting reading materials directly relate to consistent reading achievement. Consequently, several educators have expressed the desire to determine whether illiterate adults might be more successfully taught to read by using instructional, supplemental, and recreational materials concerning the students' expressed interests.

PURPOSE AND DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The present study was developed to determine whether lessons designed to emphasize students' expressed personal interest would improve functionally illiterate adults' silent reading information recall skills and interpretation of word meanings from context. (It should be noted that the investigator assessed only silent reading skills because adults usually do not have the desire or need to read orally.) Thus, this study tested the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the silent reading comprehension of functionally illiterate adults assigned interest-oriented reading materials and the comprehension of those not receiving this type of instruction. This study attempted, then, to answer the following question: Will functionally

illiterate adults who silently read personally interesting reading materials more successfully recall and interpret contextual information contained in sentences and paragraphs than adults who do not utilize this type of instructional reading material? Therefore, this study's experimental group was administered a series of thirty such interest-directed lessons, while a suitable control group received a series of thirty lessons not designed to emphasize their expressed interests.

THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

Subjects

Twenty functionally illiterate adults attending an urban adult education center were used as subjects. These students met the following criteria: (1) On the silent reading sub-test of the Adult Basic Learning Examination, Level I, Form A, used as a pre-test, all the subjects had scored lower than 4.0 grade level; and, (2) All the subjects had been previously classified by teachers as reading below 4.0 grade level. Furthermore, this group was made up of adults with a variety of interest preferences, which are emphasized in this portion of the study but were not a factor concerning the control group. The experimental group's interest preferences and the number of adults preferring each category are as follows: Sports, 7; Banking, 2; Bible Reading, 7; Children's Books, 2; and Black Studies, 2.

Instructional Procedure

The instructional sessions for the experimental group occurred over a fifteen-week period with classes on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from six o'clock to eight o'clock. Each instructional session, which was conducted by an employed teacher, included a ten-minute supplementary reading discussion segment, a thirty-minute direct-teach segment, a twenty-minute skill practice

segment, a twenty-minute skill application segment, a twenty-minute supplementary reading selection segment, and a twenty-minute snack/recreational segment.

The direct-teach segment involved individualized instruction conducted by the group's regular teacher. When introducing the skills, the teacher emphasized the ones needed to master each specific lesson. Word attack, sight word, and comprehension skills were greatly stressed during this period. During the skill practice segment, each student used duplicated worksheets which were printed with primary type and which emphasized skills introduced during the direct-teach segment. The worksheets also accented skills to be utilized during the skill application segment, which stressed the skills introduced during the direct-teach and the skill practice segments. These skills were to be used by the student in comprehending a short story written especially for his individual reading/learning preference. After reading his story silently, each student completed a brief worksheet that related to his story and that was designed to measure his reading comprehension. The supplemental reading segment of the lesson permitted each student to select out-of-class reading materials to be read at the student's diagnosed independent reading level. These materials were investigator-selected from various sources (cookbooks, religious leaflets, children's books, etc.), and were discussed at the beginning of the next class session.

Post-Test

At the end of the fifteen-week period, Level I, Form B of the Adult Basic Learning Examination (silent reading sub-test) was administered to the twenty experimental group subjects.

THE CONTROL GROUP

Subjects

Twenty functionally illiterate adults attending an urban adults education center were used as control group subjects. These students met the same criteria as those in the experimental group. However, this portion of the study did not emphasize the subjects' interest preferences.

Instructional Procedure

The instructional sessions for the control group occurred concurrently with those sessions of the experimental group. Classes met on Monday and Wednesday evenings from six o'clock to eight o'clock. The instructional sessions for this group, which were conducted by an employed teacher, were not segmented as were those for the experimental group. Instruction for the control subjects occurred in a large group arrangement that utilized commercially prepared instructional workbooks and kits.

Post-Test

At the end of the fifteen-week period, Level I, Form B of the Adult Basic Learning Examination (silent reading sub-test) was administered to the twenty experimental group subjects.

TREATMENT OF THE DATA

This study utilized a non-equivalent control group research design, and analysis of variance was the statistical treatment applied to the data collected. Scores on the Adult Basic Learning Examination, Level I, Form A, served as the criteria during the pre-test (scores on the silent reading sub-test were evaluated more critically than were scores on the vocabulary and oral reading sub-tests). The instructional treatment of students in the experimental group served as the independent variable. Scores on the Adult Basic Learning Examination, Level I, Form B (silent reading sub-test), served as the criteria during

the post-test. The F-ratio, derived from the analysis of variance, was used to test the proposed non-difference between the means of the scores of the experimental group and those of the control group. The .05 level of confidence was designated as the standard of significance.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Question: Will functionally illiterate adults who silently read personally interesting reading materials more successfully recall and interpret contextual information contained in sentences and paragraphs than adults who do not utilize this type of instructional reading material?

The students in the experimental group were compared to those in the control group on the basis of their silent reading comprehension both before and after experiencing different instructional procedures. The pre-test and the post-test emphasized individual assessment of (a) the ability to recall information after silent reading and (b) the ability to interpret word meanings from context during silent reading.

Table 1

Silent Reading Comprehension Pre-Test
Means and Adjusted Means

	Pre-Test Mean (Covariant)	Post-Test Adjusted Mean (Criterion)
Experimental Group	15.35000	37.35996
Control Group	16.30000	28.99004

Table 1 indicates a contrast of pre-test means and post-test means for the experimental group and the control group.

Table 2

Summary of Silent Reading Comprehension
Grade Level Means

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-Ratio
Between Groups	694.86009	1	694.86009	85.79779*
Covariant	2459.09386	1	2459.09386	303.63641
Error	299.65614	37	8.09881	

*Significant at the .05 level of confidence.

As Table 2 indicates, using analysis of variance to assess the differenting amounts of change in the two groups, the computed F-ratio of 85.79779 is greater than the tabled F-value of 4.06 for 1 and 37 degrees of freedom. Since this difference is significant at the .05 level of confidence, it may be concluded that students who utilized interest-oriented materials recalled information and interpreted word meanings from context better than did students who used traditional instructional materials not specifically designed or selected according to their expressed reading/learning interests.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this investigation was to determine whether lessons designed to emphasize expressed interests would improve functionally illiterate adults' silent reading information recall skills and interpretation of word meaning from context. It was found that the silent reading comprehension of students receiving specially prepared interest-oriented instructional reading materials was superior to the comprehension of those students not receiving such materials.

While this in itself is not a surprising finding, it should be mentioned that previous to this study the investigator had determined that all the subjects were able to generate meaning when they read silently. Thus, with regard to silent reading comprehension, the adults in both subject groupswere similar pre-experimentally. It appears, then, that the students receiving special instructional materials were able to process the comprehension questions on the silent reading sub-test of the Adult Basic Learning Examination, Level I, Form B, at a rate faster than that of the control subjects.

Implication

A practical implication of this study involves a need for providing interest-oriented instructional materials that stimulate and motivate functionally illiterate adults to react positively to instruction designed to consider their learning needs. From a methodological point of view, a much stronger case for the effectiveness of such specialized instruction could be made with a longitudinal study that involved a larger population of functionally illiterate adults. However, despite the fact that the present study was not longitudinal, it is undeniably evident in the results of this investigation that instructional strategies based upon the expressed interests of adults classified as functionally illiterate did result in improving silent reading comprehension scores. Additionally, the students receiving special instructional materials attended class significantly more regularly than did the adults in the control group. (The mean attendance for students in the experimental group was 28.25, while that for the students in the control group was 20.70.) Whether the improved silent reading comprehension scores were the result of the particular strategies employed, or whether those specialized strategies produced increased attendance which made greater achievement possible can be debated and resolved through further research.

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